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Spring 2008

# David Ripley, Associate Professor of Music, travels to Seoul, South Korea

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## Recommended Citation

Ripley, David, "David Ripley, Associate Professor of Music, travels to Seoul, South Korea" (2008). *Faculty Travel Reports*. 27.  
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# International Perspectives

Center for International Education

## DAVID RIPLEY, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF MUSIC

*Professor David Ripley traveled to Seoul, South Korea, in March to give a series of concerts and master classes.*



*Professor Ripley (vocalist) giving a master class*

On March 15, 2008 I had the great pleasure of boarding a flight at Logan Airport to travel to Seoul, South Korea, for a week of concerts and master classes with the ensemble for which I am male soloist,

Boston Musical Theater (BMT). BMT specializes in performing American music from the Great American Songbook up to 1970. The group consists of five of us on stage - a jazz trio (piano, bass and drums), soprano Mara Bonde and myself, and our director, Charlotte Kaufman, who rehearses with us and plans our thematic programs.

While in Seoul and farther to the south, we performed two concerts and gave two master classes at major universities. We were privileged to

have the trip, concerts and master classes arranged by the U.S. Embassy and Ambassador Alexander Vershbow. Our connection to the State Department has grown over the last ten years since we began as BMT to perform this repertoire. Ambassador Vershbow is a big fan of jazz, very knowledgeable and also the son-in-law of our director. I have worked with Charlotte on various projects for over thirty years. The ambassador heard us often in early performances at the Regatta Bar in Cambridge. Since then, he has invited us to each of his State Department assignments to strengthen cultural ties through the power of music and its highly positive impact and favorable example of American culture. In 2000 we performed for the ambassadors of NATO in Brussels, at the beginning of the Kosovo conflict, in 2002/04 in Moscow, St Petersburg and Paris. Our first CD, *All That Jazz*, was recorded live in Rachmaninoff Hall, Moscow Conservatory.

We had the immense privilege of staying at the ambassador's residence for the duration of our trip. A photo of the interior might show its splendor and fascinating history. Its design is that of a timber-frame house in traditional Korean style – the only ambassador or embassy housing in Korea to use a specifically Korean design! It is called Habib House, after the noted Ambassador Philip Habib and built, 1970's, out of giant 24''x16'' beams of Douglas Fir no less, exemplifying the strong ties between our two cultures.

After adjusting to the time change of thirteen hours – where day is now night and night now day--on Tuesday (arriving late Sunday), we traveled to Ansong, about 1-1/2 hours by bus, to DIMA University, the

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Dong-A Institute of Media and Arts. It is an absolutely state-of-the-art facility with a beautiful concert hall and its own broadcast facilities. Our class was three hours in length, facilitated by a lovely Korean interpreter from the State Department staff, and included vocal and instrumental music. As was the case in our next master classes farther to the south at Kiemyung University, we found the Koreans to be very talented, especially at Kiemyung with respect to opera singing, which was formidable. In each case we met with the university president for a formal luncheon before the class.



*Professor Ripley (tan jacket) enjoying tea ceremony*

Our two concerts featured songs from our latest CD, *Fly Me to the Moon*, which honors the great vocal legends of the American Songbook. Copies of the CD were given as gifts on every occasion. Our first concert was at a well-known Seoul venue, Kumho Art Hall. By invitation through the embassy and its Korean counterparts, the concert was sold out. About 400 were in attendance. Our next concert was a slightly shorter version of the first program given at the ambassador's residence itself. The Koreans are an incredibly gracious people and I learned much and hope to return someday. Our final day featured a trip to the DMZ, still a very tense area as recent world events indicate.

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